



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND LAND STEWARDSHIP

Bill Northey, Secretary of Agriculture

January 4, 2008

US Environmental Protection Agency,
Docket ID No.EPA-HQ-OW-2007-1126,
EPA Docket Center (EPA/DC),
Water Docket, MC 2822T,
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

RE: Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan 2008 – November 9, 2007 Draft

The following comments are offered concerning the draft Action Plan:

1. The Action Plan at page 18 states *“Numeric water quality standards for nitrogen and phosphorus are essential for achieving the necessary reductions in nitrogen and phosphorus loading in the basin”*. This section relating to water quality standards, TMDLs and NPDES permit limits is beyond the considerations of the Task Force in developing the draft plan, and constitutes a significant change. It also conflicts with wording of the plan relative to *“an adaptive management framework”* and *“the continued implementation of cost-effective, voluntary best management and conservation practices...”*. Given the naturally nutrient-rich soils and row-cropped landscapes of the Corn Belt, nearly all flowing stream segments and acres in states like Iowa will likely be designated as impaired and require TMDLs if nutrient water quality standards are adopted by EPA to address Gulf hypoxia. This contradicts the principle of targeting limited resources to critical watersheds, and will force the diversion of resources from implementation for reducing pollutants to developing TMDLs. The ability for states to adopt water quality standards to protect the Gulf under state statutes, such as Iowa’s which limit applicability of the standards to protecting in-state waters, is questionable at best.
2. The Action Plan appropriately calls for nutrient reduction strategies on a state geographic basis to be developed through the efforts of state, federal, and local agencies. However the plan specifies *“The states...have the lead for implementing most of the programs that will achieve the goals of the Action Plan”*. Implementation of the management and structural practices that will be needed for nonpoint source landscapes is beyond the resources of the states and will require significant federal resources to carry out the state-level strategies to reduce nutrients for protecting the national resource of the Gulf of Mexico, a point which needs emphasis in the plan.
3. It may not be possible to achieve the nutrient reductions called for in the Action Plan utilizing current technologies and with current cropping in the Corn Belt. New scientific findings and technology development will likely be needed. The need for federal funding should be recognized in the plan to support technology development through collaborative research initiatives such as the Upper Mississippi River Nutrient Environmental Research Center proposed by the Iowa State University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences in conjunction with other land-grant universities in the Upper Mississippi states and the Corn Belt.

Sincerely,

Bill Northey
Iowa Secretary of Agriculture